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## **Bourdieu and the Sociology of Music Consumption: A Critical Assessment of Recent Developments**

### **Introduction**

Do you like jazz? If you do there is a strong likelihood that you will also like classical music but be less well inclined towards hip hop. How about heavy metal? Chances are if you are a fan of AC/DC, Motörhead and Black Sabbath, then you'll also like rock music, but be less than enthralled with country and western. These, at least, are some of the findings from a recent large-scale study of the structuring of cultural tastes in Britain (Bennett *et al*, 2009). People, it seems, not only tend to specify clear preferences for particular music genres, but do so passionately and in mutually exclusive ways. Strenuously liking x is often accompanied by an equally strenuous disliking of y (Bryson, 1996). Tastes for certain types of music are also correlated with social variables, according to the research. A preference for "urban music" is more likely to be found amongst 18-24 year olds, for instance, whereas the active pursuit of classical music is predominantly the preserve of the educated middle classes.

These findings might not be all that surprising. Not only do they echo the widespread assumption that people's tastes are influenced by the social groups that they belong to, but they also show that genre categories matter (Negus, 1999a). When asked what kinds of music we like, our recourse is normally to such categories, after all. We are, first and foremost, fans of techno, reggae, jazz, indie, rap and so on. But can the totality of our music tastes really be measured so precisely with social scientific instruments? Is it possible to encapsulate our attachments to music by mapping our preferences to social indicators and taste clusters? As music lovers we might feel irritated by these findings precisely because we invest so much of our selves in music (Frith, 1996). We figure music to be a personal expression of our individuality, to be inherently pleasurable and therefore beyond rational measurement. There really is nothing like an academic study to suck the fun out of music!

But this scepticism is increasingly shared by scholars in the social scientific community, too. Some have argued that putting our tastes into boxes and matching them to socio-economic categories neglects the ways our lives are intimately entwined with music, including how it surprises us or modulates our tastes and emotions (DeNora, 2000; Hennion, 2007). Others have suggested that musical tastes are open and fluid rather than attached to tightly defined groups, as consumers listen to and appreciate a diverse range of styles (Peterson and Kern, 1996). This is particularly so with the rise of digital technologies and the browse-click-store capabilities of devices like ipods (Jones, 2006; Bull, 2007). When the whole history of music is available at our fingertips, aren't our tastes always undergoing redefinition, mutation and expansion?

At the centre of these debates is the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. For it is Bourdieu whose work has become the touchstone for sociological examinations of taste and consumption. Bourdieu's formidable tome, *Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1984), in particular, stands as arguably the most influential study of cultural preferences ever conducted. Based on data collected in France in the 1960s, Bourdieu shows that distinctions between goods in the universe of cultural objects are also *social* distinctions that help crystallise inequalities in society at large. Here, the selections that we make as consumers - fish and chips or *foie gras* - are not irreducible

personal discernments (we “just like” this or that dish, band or television programme). Rather, they are expressions of our upbringing, occupation and whether we went to university or not - in short our social class. Consumer choices also have structural implications, according to Bourdieu, because they stack onto already existing differences between higher and lower social classes and the relative affinities they have for higher or lower culture. Personal tastes and cultural distinctions, in other words, are significant to the maintenance of social divisions in a stratified society.

The following article traces the impact of Bourdieu’s ideas on the sociology of music, specifically that corner of sociological research focused on consumption and taste. Ten years after his death, the legacy of Bourdieu’s thinking is still keenly felt in the way sociologists talk about and understand musical tastes. If not quite paradigmatic, Bourdieu’s conceptual apparatus has provided an important frame of reference for a “critical” sociology concerned with showing how power and inequality are central to categorisations of music (Prior, 2011). But Bourdieu’s legacy is now under question and in this “post-Bourdieu” moment, it is pertinent to ask two questions. Firstly, to what extent do Bourdieu’s claims about social stratification and music consumption still hold up today? In other words, what assumptions can we make based on available data about the relationship between social inequalities and patterns of music consumption? Secondly, are Bourdieu’s ideas sophisticated enough to deal with the specific ways that we interact with musical forms, their active presence in our everyday lives and the meanings we attach to them? If not, what alternative approaches are there and where do they lead us theoretically and empirically?

After a brief description of Bourdieu’s sociological conception of taste, then, the article will examine what might be called the “turn to Bourdieu” in the sociology of music and assess some of the key controversies and debates sparked in its wake.

### **Music, Class and Cultural Capital**

Bourdieu didn’t have a great deal to say about music. What he did say, however, was striking. In *Distinction*, he writes the following:

“...nothing more clearly affirms one’s ‘class’, nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music” (Bourdieu, 1984: 18).

For Bourdieu, knowledge of music represents a distinctly “pure” knowledge because its presence is marked less by an outward display (as with museum visiting or cuisine) and more by an inner appreciation in the form of listening. It is in music’s silence and rarity that it expresses its symbolic potency. Here, Bourdieu is limiting his observations to classical music, but his broader point is that in separating itself from the “real world”, classical music is opposed to the immediate gratifications of “light” or popular entertainment. A distinction is immediately apparent, here, between high and low culture in the ways that these worlds are organized and the connections of the former to the finest achievements of European civilisation. As legitimate culture, classical music gathers around it the highest values of aesthetic formalism associated with Kantian “disinterestedness”. This is the idea that in its dependence on form (how) rather than function (what), classical music is nothing but itself, “it says nothing and has *nothing to say*” (Bourdieu, 1984: 19).

But herein lies the ruse of the ideology of natural taste. For what Bourdieu shows is that an appreciation for high culture is not a matter of pure aesthetic judgment at all, but a product of privileged social conditions that are the foundation for the instillation of stocks of cultural resources. These resources comprise what Bourdieu calls “cultural capital”, acquired as individuals undergo processes of socialization in the

family and school and which are manifest in the “feel” that they have for different types of culture. Whilst those with high levels of cultural capital feel at home with esoteric culture and display an understanding of the language needed to talk about it, those with low levels of cultural capital are disenfranchised and feel out of their depth. Indeed, the lower classes often self-exclude themselves from the game of high culture precisely because it feels alien to them. Hence, the common phrase: “it’s not for the likes of us”.

Different class-based frames of reference for engaging with culture are embodied in what Bourdieu calls the *habitus*. This is the system of unconscious dispositions which shape the broad behavioural trajectories and life chances of individuals (Bourdieu, 1992). It is Bourdieu's way of explaining how action tends to follow patterns without this being the result of either willful strategising or mechanical determination. Instead, the *habitus* comprises a deeply internalized set of “master patterns” or “mental habits” that individuals resort to as part of the social conditions in which they find themselves. Formally defined by Bourdieu as a “system of durable, transposable dispositions” (Bourdieu, 1992: 53), the *habitus* can be understood as something like cultural DNA. Though acquired, it is constantly activated in the minute details of our bodily actions: what we say and how we say it, how we dress, our accent and deportment. Whilst there is some disagreement amongst commentators about how much room the *habitus* gives for deviation from rigid pathways of action, it is nevertheless a powerful way of describing the consistent features of people’s lives (Jenkins, 1992; Swartz, 1997). It is able to explain, for instance, why it is that people with similar educational backgrounds, who “speak the same language” and “see the world in a similar way”, tend to partner up.

So how does music fit here? Well, two points are worth extrapolating from Bourdieu’s core ideas. Firstly, in terms of the development of a musical *habitus*, a child who grows up in a household in which they are encouraged to play a “noble” instrument like the piano or violin is already accumulating nascent mastery over legitimate musical culture. Their upbringing is preparing them for membership of a polite world, a world which, according to Bourdieu:

“is justified in existing by its perfection, its harmony and beauty, a world which has produced Beethoven and Mozart and continues to produce people capable of playing and appreciating them” (Bourdieu, 1984: 77).

Early attendance at classical music concerts is similarly the passing down of an aesthetic family heirloom dressed up as good grace, the ultimate effect of which is to turn objective structures (stratified inequalities) into embodied conduct (everyday actions). In short, an inheritance of cultural capital is a predicate for musical distinction. One only has to witness the force and regularity with which privately-educated children are encouraged by their parents to play a classical instrument to see the dispositions of a refined musical *habitus* in gestation.

Secondly, however, the lower and dominated classes are, for Bourdieu, left to consume less revered and “challenging” types of music. At the time that Bourdieu was writing, distinct affinities existed between petite-bourgeois consumers and what he termed “middlebrow” music. The popularity of Gershwin’s “Rhapsody in Blue” amongst technicians and engineers was a case in point. Lower class respondents in domestic or manual work, on the other hand, tended to favour the popular waltzes of Strauss or “music whose simple, repetitive structures invite a passive absent participation” (Bourdieu, 1984: 386). Here, Bourdieu is alluding to what we now call popular music and whilst he fails to register its inner complexities, his point is that in the 1960s, this type of music existed in a structured *field* of relations that was

opposed in terms of its value and market position to classical music. It didn't have the same legitimacy or credibility as the former. It was, in fact, devalued by its very popularization and dependence on commercial logics.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Turn to Bourdieu**

It's not hard to see why sociologists of music extract so much analytical value from Bourdieu's ideas. Not only do they provide a way of making sense of the macro-historical and organisational differences between classical and popular music, but they also unveil the hidden sociological significance of micro-musical preferences. Very few competing approaches in the modern sociological tradition have revealed how society fits together at a structural level while linking this to empirical data on everyday behaviour. Little wonder, then, that Bourdieu's ideas have been deployed to examine musical phenomena in a variety of settings, from Brazilian and Japanese pop music (Frota, 2006; Ferranti, 2002) to Italian opera and British indie rock (Johnson, Fulcher and Ertman, 2007; Hibbett, 2005).

Bourdieu's impact on *popular* music studies, in particular, has been striking in the years since *Distinction* was written. His concepts have been crucial to the development of a modern sociology grappling with how the whole music/society jigsaw fits together in a period that has witnessed the radical expansion of the pop-rock field. Bourdieu's terminology circulates widely in the discourses of associated conferences, journals and textbooks, while a veritable "Bourdieu industry" has sprung up in the discipline of sociology at large (Prior, 2011). Bourdieu's impact on the sociology of music *production* has been equally noteworthy. Indeed, two of Bourdieu's texts, *The Rules of Art* (Bourdieu, 1996) and *The Field of Cultural Production* (Bourdieu, 1993), have set the grounds for a possible sociology of creativity, where genre and aesthetic position-takings only make sense within a structured setting of semi-autonomous activity. Contemporary scholars like Jason Toynbee have effectively combined Bourdieu's field and habitus concepts to explain how music making takes place within a "radius of creativity" (Toynbee, 2000: 40), for instance, articulating local acts of creative agency with a historically-bounded set of institutions, markets and constraints.

Bourdieu's is not the only game in town, of course. Competing perspectives anchored in other traditions such as feminism, semiotics, interactionism and critical theory, have in many respects been just as influential in the examination of music consumption and production. A focus on the stylistic and class-based elements of subcultures, for instance, is central to the development of an influential strand of British cultural studies from the 1980s, albeit one that tended to celebrate every act of consumption as resistance (Fiske, 1989; Hebdige, 1979). Adorno's neo-Marxist critique of popular music as a sensuous but standardized commodity, on the other hand, has remained an essential reference point, particularly for those interested in examining industry structures (Hesmondalgh, 2007b). (This time, the problem has been in caricaturing consumers as passive dupes, however). As far as the adoption of Bourdieu's ideas is concerned, furthermore, it is far from the case that popular music scholars have adopted Bourdieu's ideas uncritically or in their totality. Those who profess some sympathy for Bourdieu's concepts have often pointed to significant shortcomings in his work, finding it overly rigid or lacking a convincing account of technology and creative agency (Prior, 2008; Born, 2010).

On the other hand, a cursory glance at a handful of popular music studies texts illustrates Bourdieu's canonical status in the field (Rojek, 2011; Bennett, Shank and Toynbee, 2006; Théberge, 1997; Toynbee, 2000). He is certainly a primary reference point for scholars collecting empirical data on musical tastes as well as those with a

more critical agenda looking to explain how popular music's place in society is inseparable from questions of power and inequality. Two notable works here are Simon Frith's *Performing Rites* (1996) and Sarah Thornton's *Clubcultures* (1995).

Frith begins *Performing Rites*, for instance, with a series of anecdotes that express the centrality of judgment to the pleasures of popular music. "To be engaged with popular culture", he says, "is to be discriminating" (Frith, 1996: 4). Arguments about the merits of particular bands, genres and songs are the weft and weave of everyday "musicking" (Small, 1998) because they articulate with our desire to share with and relate to one another. We assume, for instance, that we are likely to get on with someone with similar tastes to ourselves and that someone with a comparable record collection or who makes good playlists sees the world in a similar way to us.

Frith's point, however, is that the claims made around knowledge of popular music are also expressions of superiority and discrimination, just as they are in high culture and classical music. In other words, taste hierarchies don't just exist *between* high and low culture but also *within* popular culture as well. Here, Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital is employed by Frith to show how a specific kind of capital native to popular music generates distinctions and struggles over what is aesthetically valuable. This plays out in claims and counter-claims around whether certain bands are interesting or innovative, whether their music challenges us or makes us think. Taking a value position on a band's progressive credentials - where terms such as "edgy" and "alternative" trip off the tongue - are simultaneously performances of one's discrimination and distance from overly-commercial styles. Again, Frith is far from uncritical of Bourdieu's conflation of taste with class, noting that pop tastes are not just expressions of class, gender or ethnic background but also shape and potentially disrupt, extend and strengthen these sources of identification, a view shared by Hesmondalgh (2007b). But still, that aesthetic valuation is central to music's role as a social and collective identifier is indisputable. After all, as Bourdieu (1993) noted, there is symbolic profit to be made in knowing what is rare and exclusive.

This is a point developed more directly by Thornton (1995) in relation to the intricate differentiations that operate in dance music. Based on a study of British rave culture in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Thornton shows how the social world of clubbing is structured around a deep division between "chartpop" and "underground" music. The idea of the "mainstream", in particular, is a potent device deployed by discerning clubbers to distance themselves from consumers branded as fake. Here, the recurrent trope of "Sharon and Tracy dancing around their handbags" becomes an image of the tasteless that structures the distinction strategies of the knowing raver. A clubber's "hipness" is defined, instead, by a specialist insider knowledge of labels and genres, wearing the right clothes and attending clubs perceived and constructed as authentic (see also Goulding, Shankar and Elliot, 2002).

What is circulating here, for Thornton, is a subspecies of cultural capital she calls "subcultural capital". This she defines as "...being 'in the know', using (but not over-using) current slang and looking as if you were born to perform the latest dance styles" (Thornton, 1995: 11-12). Though less moored in social class than age and gender categories, subcultural capital nevertheless functions according to logics of social distinction. This is clear in the way that clubbers wield their knowledge as a cultural weapon by articulating a distaste for lower class females vilified as tacky and imitative. Such distinctions are asymmetrical, for they involve both a claim to authority and an assumption of the inferiority of others, according to Thornton. We are therefore back to the idea that musical preferences work in a structured field of positions defined as much by dislikes as likes.

Indeed, Bennett *et al*'s (2009) far-reaching study of consumption habits in the UK, which was itself modelled on Bourdieu's investigations in *Distinction*, corroborates many of Thornton's findings. For instance, the authors describe a profoundly divided field of popular musical tastes in which people find it hard to be neutral about their musical preferences. When respondents were asked to report how much they liked or disliked a series of eight different genres, for instance, the most common response on a sliding scale of 1-7 was 7, signifying extreme dislike. This included more than half of over 1500 respondents expressing a deep aversion to heavy metal (see also Bryson, 1996). "I actually detest...R&B", one respondent says. "I can't stand Abba", offers another (in Bennett *et al*, 2009: 88).

A deep social division between popular and classical music devotees is also apparent from this data, with correlations between the latter and higher education. Graduates were six times more likely to report a preference for classical music than those with no qualifications, for instance, whilst no working-class interviewees displayed a deep appreciation for classical music, according to the authors (Bennett, *et al*, 2009). Clearly, differentials in cultural capital still work themselves out in divisions between classical and contemporary music, as they did in Bourdieu's study. Symbolic legitimacy still circulates around classical music as an elite pursuit, with opera serving, in particular, as an outlet for "respectable socialising" (Bennett *et al*, 2009: 92).

But two important qualifications emerge from Bennett *et al*'s study. The first implies a subtle historical update of Bourdieu's ideas. The study shows that it is no longer in the field of classical music that intense position-takings and attachments occur. Indeed, many respondents viewed classical music as background music that they listened to for the sole purpose of relaxation and therefore not music to get particularly animated about (Bennett *et al*, 2009). This leads the authors to the conclusion that the symbolic power of classical music may be declining among middle-class groups. Rather, it is in the field of popular music that the most potent and intense attachments take place, and where the most significant internal divisions occur. Aesthetic judgments now mark out what are sometimes quite narrow differences between groups in the contemporary field, essential to which is, *contra* Bourdieu, the circulation of forms of popular cultural capital. In other words, if contemporary pop music was once the poor relation at the fringes of legitimate culture it is now firmly at the centre of the field of musical production.

The second qualification, however, implies something more contentious. For while Bennett *et al*'s study contains some evidence of a relationship between social indicators and musical tastes, it also suggests changes to the way these tastes intersect with social class and cultural capital. In particular, the study finds *some* openness and diversity in the range of musical styles enjoyed by respondents, raising the prospect that certain consumers are less "univorous" in their musical diets, sampling instead from across a range of genres conventionally seen as high, low and middlebrow. In other words, certain music consumers are more eclectic or "omnivorous" in their tastes than was assumed by Bourdieu, undermining the central connection that he makes between taste and cultural capital.

### **The Challenge to Bourdieu**

Known as the "cultural omnivore" thesis, this idea is associated with the work of the American sociologist Richard A. Peterson and contains a direct empirical challenge to Bourdieu's ideas in *Distinction*. Peterson's claim is that taste regimes in contemporary societies have undergone a shift away from a dichotomous model of

elite-to-mass culture ("snob versus slob"), to a situation characterised by a new openness amongst higher-class consumers to a diverse repertoire of cultural goods. Such consumers no longer restrict their tastes to elite forms of art, goes the argument, but participate in a heterogeneous range of cultural practices and receive some degree of prestige from doing so (Peterson and Simkus, 1992). A looser set of connections is therefore implied between social stratification and taste variables, casting doubt on any model that posits a tight and exclusive relation between them.

The debates sparked by these claims have reverberated loudly in the field of cultural sociology, where a number of subsequent studies have attempted to critically engage with, refine or elaborate on the omnivore thesis (Atkinson, 2011). Outstanding questions include to what extent the trend to omnivorousness is supported by the data at all, whether it is a recent historical shift, local to the U.S. or designates a more widespread, democratic cultural condition. There is also some discussion around what omnivorousness actually means. Is it "liking everything indiscriminately" or something like an "openness to appreciate everything" (Warde *et al*, 2007)? Peterson and Kern are careful to point out that omnivorousness does not mean a complete indifference to distinctions. Rather they say, "its emergence may suggest the formulation of new rules governing symbolic boundaries" (Peterson and Kern, 1996: 904). But this still raises the question of what thresholds of engagement must exist for omnivorousness to register empirically. Does a "passing knowledge" for popular cultural forms count? And if so, what does "passing knowledge" actually mean? Is it recognising, naming, buying and liking things or some deeper engagement with cultural goods (Bennett, Emmison and Frow, 1999)?

In the sociology of music, these debates have particular resonance because the thrust of the omnivore thesis rests on the interpretation of data on music tastes. Peterson and Simkus (1992) are quick to emphasise that more of the higher-ranking occupational groups in their study preferred music genres conventionally seen as lowbrow, like country and western, than those considered highbrow, like opera. The claim that higher groups are more inclusive in their tastes is also evident, for Peterson and Simkus, in the way such groups seek out and appropriate "edgy" popular forms. Nowadays, there may be as much cultural cachet in name-checking a Frank Ocean track as recognising a Shostakovich score. Indeed, Peterson and Kern raise the tantalising prospect that consumers might be becoming more open-minded about other styles *in general*. They point out that omnivorousness was more widespread in 1992 than it was in 1982, for instance. In other words, the shift from exclusionist snob to inclusionist omnivore might be part of a wider historical trend towards greater tolerance of those with different tastes and values (Peterson and Kern, 1996).

The question remains to what extent these assertions rest on idealised assumptions and/or are specific to social stratification in the U.S.. Social class and inequality are uniquely configured in different countries, after all. Yet, in addition to Bennett *et al*'s study, some further evidence for the omnivore thesis can be found in the UK context, too. This is provided by Goldthorpe and Chan (2007) and is based on an examination of data from the Arts in England survey of 2001 on rates of participation in the arts. Here, the authors concentrate on music consumption in order to examine the social character of respondents' tastes. Although resulting in the testing of a very narrow range of genres (the original survey itself divided up music into only four categories, opera/opera, jazz, classical and pop/rock), Goldthorpe and Chan argue that the data support crucial aspects of the omnivore argument. For instance, they find that those who are most likely to attend classical concerts and opera are also most likely to attend musicals and listen to pop and rock music. They also note a failure to detect a coherent musical elite who ardently demonstrate "high" musical taste while



rejecting more popular musical forms. Again, the target here is Bourdieu since, the authors argue, the assertion that music is an "infallible classifier" is not borne out by the existence of a dominant class which seeks to straightforwardly appropriate high culture (Goldthorpe and Chan, 2007).

Where this leaves Bourdieu's empirical legacy is a matter of some debate. On the one hand, the omnivore argument still posits at least some relation of musical taste to stratification. Lower class consumers are more likely to be univores, for instance. Being omnivorous might also just be the latest strategy of distinction amongst higher class consumers – a way of displaying one's voracious appetite for a range of cultural forms. On the other hand, the omnivore thesis is predicated on a loosening of the relatively tight bonds that, for Bourdieu, exist between social origins and musical taste. This highlights to what extent Bourdieu's model still works in societies where stratification is less rigid and classes less clearly demarcated. More than one commentator has noted how Bourdieu's model is inflexible and unable to properly register social change (Jenkins, 1992). This is because, for some critics, he conceptualises action as locked into class-based trajectories through a series of repetitive habits that reproduce unequal social structures.

Two contemporary strands of social change are particularly noteworthy. Firstly, critics of Bourdieu point to the expansion of secondary and mass higher education and its potential impact on social mobility. For Goldthorpe (2007), for instance, in reducing education to an engine of class inequality, Bourdieu neglects the ways that modern educational systems loosen inequalities and provide opportunities for children from lower class backgrounds. Here, we might mention the state provision of music education in secondary schools and various initiatives to encourage young people to play an instrument (Green, 2002). Secondly, there is the impact of new technologies on taste and stratification. The digitalisation of music, in particular, has had far-reaching implications for how consumers access, distribute and listen to music. Digital formats and devices such as iPods have not just made music more mobile (Bull, 2007), but have potentially liquefied genre categories (Sandywell and Beer, 2005) and given users historically unprecedented access to an ever-proliferating body of musical works (Reynolds, 2011).<sup>2</sup> In such a context, it takes a rather large leap in faith and logic to suppose that the musical *habitus* remains so static as to resist processes of mutation, extension and deformation.<sup>3</sup>

As the French sociologist Bernard Lahire notes, individual dispositions are not always internally coherent because individuals are subject to various experiences across plural contexts. The irregular and bumpy contours of our worlds trigger what he calls "intra-individual behavioural variations" (Lahire, 2008:166) which result in often dissonant cultural profiles. Our musical pathways as consumers, for instance, are subject to multiple determinations, including those of a more contingent nature. I look at my own record collection and I recognise variable and temporary musical encounters: a brief flirtation with acid techno on the recommendation of a friend of my brother's; a Portishead CD that I can no longer listen to because of its associations with illness; a Mighty Lemon Drops LP that I listen to through the (excruciating) prism of having my teeth knocked out at one of their gigs; a collection of Swedish children's songs bought on a whim from a charity shop; and barely a single jazz or classical CD. Not that these musical choices are entirely random or disconnected from my social background. But neither are they products of a unified dispositional set. They are, instead, indications of the crossings into multiple socio-musical worlds, some momentary, others more durable, but always constituted through heterogeneous and sometimes contrasting experiences.

## **Beyond Bourdieu**

Indeed, for some sociologists, if we start from the idea that music taste is a marker of group identities or dependent on stocks of cultural capital we ask the wrong kinds of questions. This is because music itself and our encounters with it are far more complex than can be conveyed through the idea of social origins, let alone statistical data sets and genre categorisations. Survey measurements, after all, tell us very little about why people like music and the uses and meanings they make of music in their everyday lives.

For Tia DeNora, sociologists have been too quick to discard the *musical* properties of music. They've ignored the multifarious ways that music "gets into action" (DeNora, 2000: 8), including how it activates our memories and emotional states. To take music seriously means to avoid reducing it to an indicator of some hidden structural social force or distinction strategy. Music is more dynamic than this, for DeNora. It modulates emotions, evokes senses and equips identities. In the flow of everyday life, music affords an "inner sonorous life" (DeNora, 2004: 217), acting with and upon our phenomenological worlds, colouring our loves, desire and feelings. Drawing on insights from interactionism and ethnomethodology, DeNora argues that if we ground our sociological analysis in the local situations in which music is *used*, we are able to properly recognize music's powers (DeNora, 2000). This means shifting the level of examination from a general sociology of music to a specific sociology of people doing things *with* music; from the idea of constraining social structures to the constitutive effects of musical meanings.

Indeed, the idea that music is a "technology" that helps constitute our selves (DeNora, 1999) is consonant with the way consumers themselves articulate their musical relations. Lovers have "our songs", DJs speak of the "music that makes me who I am", while listeners in general talk of the "soundtracks of their lives". The pragmatist recognition of music's affective presence suggests that the model of attachment offered by the enthusiast is more faithful to music's intensities than many clinical sociological studies. As the French sociologist Antoine Hennion argues, music lovers are never passive, they are engaged and inventive in how they allow music to enter their lives. This leads him to call for an alternative sociology of music to Bourdieu's, one which draws on Actor Network Theory's recognition of the agency of objects and the ongoing adjustments that occur as music exchanges its properties with us (Hennion, 2008).

For Hennion, music taste is not a property but an activity. It is a dynamic set of engagements that have sensuous, physiological components and which unfold moment to moment (Hennion, 2007). Here, the music itself matters because it *is* the sum of its effects and reactions. Our taste does not come from an external mechanism of distinction, for Hennion, but is in the "stirring of bodies" (Hennion, 2008: 41) and "savouring of pleasure[s]" (Hennion, 2008: 44). Like DeNora, Hennion asks us to return to people's own accounts and inventive strategies of meaning-making, including the practical effects of musical materials on listening as a practice. Not so much a sociology of distinction, then, as much as a phenomenology of dedication, where music is a "ceremony of pleasure, a series of little habits and ways of doing things in real life...a group of routines, arrangements and surprises" (Hennion, 1999: 7).

Indeed, one of the key implications of a post-Bourdieu "rebellion" is that an orthodox sociological approach alone is insufficient and in need of disciplinary supplementation. The work of Georgina Born (2010) is significant here, in the way it registers the specific, material properties of music as it mediates and constitutes the inner lives of musicians and listeners. Born's call is for a broader, non-reductive

model of cultural production that moves beyond Bourdieu's overly structuralist account by accounting for the agency of creators and their objects. But this can only be achieved, for Born, through an act of disciplinary augmentation. Specifically, sociology needs to take seriously the attempt to recognise aesthetic autonomy and the force of the object found in the anthropology of art. For anthropologists like Steven Feld and Alfred Gell, she argues, are properly tuned in to the expressive, temporal qualities and distinct ontologies of art forms because they show in detail the mediating role that art's materiality plays in social relations. In distinction to Bourdieu's neat but ultimately rigid sociology of taste, such work reconnects with what is specifically physical and meaningful about our encounters with cultural objects, for Born. This opens up music to a new "post-Bourdieuian" analytics where taste and consumption are more than social weapons.

All this means that a position once deemed radical and progressive in the sociology of music is itself under question as alternative positions are excavated and explored. Whilst internationally, some scholarly outlets (such as the journal *Poetics*) are still broadly sympathetic to Bourdieusian approaches, the current state of play in Anglo-American sociology of music is eclectic. A newly emerging emphasis on performativity, for instance, draws on theoretical developments in American cultural sociology, where actors are conceived as conveying meaning through communicative acts, such as competitions (McCormick, 2009). A post-humanist turn to models of "circulation" on the other hand, is evident in the way some scholars are exploring how music and media travel through mobile communication systems, effectively collapsing the distinction between production and consumption and dispersing digital objects like music into what Straw calls the "generative matrix" (Straw, 2010: 215).

In some respects, these developments in the field of scholarship mark the inevitable process of "social ageing" that Bourdieu himself identified as crucial to the development of cultural, educational (and we might add, technological) fields (Bourdieu, 1993). In fact, to the extent that the Bourdieusian approach itself became a kind of orthodoxy, it was always unlikely that the debate between those sympathetic to his ideas and those more critical of his concepts would ever be resolved on the basis of evidence alone. As disputes around the cultural omnivore thesis have shown, the same evidence can be interpreted in markedly different ways to support broadly pro or anti-Bourdieu positions. Whilst staunch defenders of Bourdieu have tended to give little ground in debates about musical taste, detractors are just as wont to hurriedly consign Bourdieu to a classical past that is unable to capture recent transformations in education, technology and stratification. Those who have attempted something like a middle ground position have had to tread delicately between these poles in the spirit of a critical but sympathetic reappraisal of Bourdieu's ideas (Prior, 2009; Atkinson, 2011). But even here, it's often unclear if researchers are merely producing "Bourdieu style" texts rather than critically appropriating the legacy that he left us (Lahire, 2011). Meanwhile, the concerns of the sociology of music are themselves developing at a rapid pace to catch up with developments in copyright law, digital technologies, globalisation and wholesale changes to the music industry (Regev, 2011). And, in this context, it is not entirely clear how central Bourdieu's ideas will be to future generations of scholars.

## Conclusion

What we do know, however, is that tastes in music are a remarkably instructive barometer of wider sociological processes. Music has special significance in how we construct and negotiate our social identities. If not always straightforwardly a classifier of social class *per se*, music nevertheless marks out important differences

in how we stake a claim for ourselves as belonging to particular social groups and taste cultures, even in high-tech, information-rich, globalized societies. While his ideas might not appear as watertight as they once were, it is still Bourdieu who, more than any other single sociologist, has provided us with the most elegant and fertile conceptual scheme to make sense of how music mediates, intersects with and expresses power relations – power relations and stratified social trajectories that are, moreover, often glossed in accounts considered post-Bourdieuian. And for that, sociologists of music will be forever in his debt.

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Bourdieu's concept of the field has been particularly fruitful, here, because it orients researchers to the dynamic space of social relations within which music production takes place. In the case of the field of music, the field is split into two sub-fields, for Bourdieu. On the one hand, the "large-scale" or "heteronomous" sub-field of production and, on the other, the "delimited" or "restricted" sub-field. While the delimited sub-field is defined by its autonomy from commercial mass markets and its

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appeal to small, specialized audiences, the large-scale sub-field is defined by its proximity to the broader field of power and economic determinants (Bourdieu, 1990). In music, we can recognize the distinction between genres and styles that are positioned as experimental, innovative or “independent” versus more commercial styles of music.

<sup>2</sup> According to Reynolds (2011), the vast musical archive available on sites and services like YouTube and Spotify has redrawn pop’s relation to its past, resulting in an obsession with older styles, artifacts and fashions which he terms “retromania”.

<sup>3</sup> To be fair, however, in a context where the search for music is often mediated by software-generated “recommendations” and the sharing of playlists, one can imagine that Bourdieu’s model might still show how tastes tend to cluster around stratified networks in the digital age. The emergence of influential music sites like pitchfork.com, for instance, illustrate how a will to distinction is prevalent amongst highbrow popular music lovers often (albeit pejoratively) termed “hipster”.